

Rougon-Macquart" But when all is said " La Terre" re-  
mains one of his strongest and most truthful  
"books."<sup>1</sup>

The savage brutishness of the chief  
characters in the  
work may well seem impossible to the  
ignorant; but al-  
though in reading "La Terre" one should  
always bear in  
mind that Zola never pretended that all  
peasants were like  
those in his grim picture, it is certain that Ms  
personages,  
individually, are accurately drawn. Awful is the  
record of  
parricides, matricides, fratricides, common  
murders, murder-  
ous assaults, rapes, and offences of inferior  
degree perpetrated in rural France. And earth hunger,  
disputes about  
property, "boundaries, inheritances, and so forth,  
will he found  
at the bottom of the great majority of cases.  
But "La  
Terre" does not deal exclusively with the  
criminal side of  
peasant life. It pictures many other features:  
it describes  
the drawbacks of the small-holdings system,  
shows agri-  
culture hampered by the extreme subdivision  
of the soil,  
traces the march of revolutionary and socialist  
principles  
among those who till it; sketching, too, on the  
way, the  
treatment which the imperial *regime*  
accorded to the  
peasantry.

There is not space here to pass all the  
Bougon-Macquart  
volumes in review from a critical point of view.  
One may  
say, however, that generally, though not  
invariably, those  
dealing with a multiplicity of characters are  
superior to

those in which Zola analyses the feelings and actions of a few. It is acknowledged he excelled in portraying the

i A writer in the "Athenaeum" [No. 3911, October 11, 1902], when renewing Miss Betham-Edwards's "East of Paris," pointed out that in a previous work, "Prance of To-day,"<sup>7</sup> 1892, she had denounced "La Terre," and declared it to be "crushingly refuted" j whereas ten years later she admitted that it was "not without foundation on fact/'